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## II. PLANNING CONTEXT

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### A. PLAN AREA

#### 1. Location, Physical Characteristics, and Current Uses

The community of Del Mar Mesa consists of 2,042 acres located approximately 20 miles north of downtown San Diego, four miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and approximately equidistant from Interstates 5 (I-5) and 15 (I-15). Del Mar Mesa is located in the North City Future Urbanizing Area (NCFUA) and is identified as Subarea V in the NCFUA.

A large portion of the eastern end of the community is in a natural state and includes several trails. Currently, the community is served by one main unimproved road, formerly known as Shaw Ridge Road. This road has been renamed Del Mar Mesa Road and is in the process of being paved and widened to 50 feet of right-of-way, including 28 feet of pavement, a ten-foot multiuse trail and a six-foot parkway. Del Mar Mesa Road will extend from Carmel Country Road to the eastern portion of the development area in the community. The western portion of the community includes a completed 18-hole golf course, existing residential development and the grading and construction for residential units to be located around the golf course. No sewer or water easements exist in Del Mar Mesa, although there are approximately 25 residences. Most zoning in the community is AR-1-1, or one dwelling unit for every ten acres, although about ten percent of the community is zoned AR-1-2, or one dwelling unit for each acre. The northern and the southern portions of the community are located within the state of California's Coastal Zone.

The western portion of Del Mar Mesa is characterized by a golf course and open space in Shaw Valley and custom single-family homes located primarily in the north, along Del Mar Mesa Road. The eastern portion of the Del Mar Mesa is characterized by relatively undisturbed stands of dense chaparral punctuated by sections of coastal sage scrub and scrub oak woodland. Several equestrian facilities are located along Del Mar Mesa Road in this area, and a 200-foot-wide San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) transmission line easement traverses the southern edge of Del Mar Mesa, turning northward, and crossing Deer Canyon.

The elevations in the community range from approximately 125 feet above mean sea level (AMSL) at the western most boundary, to approximately 440 feet AMSL in the southern portion of Del Mar Mesa, overlooking the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Regional access to the site is provided by I-5 via the partially built segment of State Route 56 (SR-56), with entry through the northwestern corner of the community on Carmel Country Road.

## **2. History**

Historical sites within Del Mar Mesa represent components of a farming settlement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Visual reminders of the former agricultural settlement include remnants of eucalyptus groves and scatters of surface artifacts. Although farmsteads were widely spaced throughout this area, the early settlers shared community interests based on social and economic endeavors. Carmel Valley provided the main avenue of travel and transportation to Del Mar, which was the nearest community. With completion of a railway passing through Del Mar in the early 1880s, the local farmers were provided with a means of transporting goods to a broader market than that offered by sea transport.

The 1884 United States Geological Survey (USGS) map reveals that much of the land adjacent to and within Del Mar Mesa was owned by members of the McGonigle family. Buildings and features associated with the McGonigles include a house, cabin, fence, field and county road. Evidence of additional settlement by 1891 is provided by school records available for the years 1891 through 1910. Certain family names that appear consistently in the Soledad District records during the early years are Knecktel, Nieman (aka Neimann and Niemann), Barnhardt, Rimbach, Mecklenseck, Davies, and Ginter. With several exceptions, the location of dwellings associated with these families has not been determined.

The Knecktel, Mecklenseck, and Neimann families proved to be long-term residents of the area. All were associated with farming activities in Shaw Valley and on Del Mar Mesa. Three generations of Knecktels have farmed Carmel Valley and Shaw Valley and several members of the family continue to live in the area. The Mecklensecks farmed land in Shaw Valley and on the mesa. As with other farmers in the area, they practiced dry farming and in later years had an egg business which remained in operation until 1984. The Neimanns built their home on Del Mar Mesa in 1895. They were among the first in this area to plant orchards on their farmstead. A 1928 aerial photograph depicts the orchards to the north and northwest of a complex of buildings. The Neimann home remains intact as a component of the Carmel Valley Ranch.

In the 1950s, there appears to have been a brief endeavor to establish communal living on Del Mar Mesa. Also, during the 1950s, the City of San Diego developed a program in concert with landowners, to build dams to reduce flooding in Carmel Valley. Many of the dams have since been destroyed. In the 1960s and 1970s, the general area attracted a number of horse farms which are now well-established.

## **3. Surrounding Land Use**

Existing land uses to the west, northwest, east and southeast of the Del Mar Mesa consist of existing and planned residential areas in the communities of Carmel Valley, Torrey Hills (formerly Sorrento Hills) and Rancho Peñasquitos.

Development within these planned communities is primarily suburban in nature and largely comprised of single-family homes on 5,000-square-foot lots, townhomes, condominium complexes and apartments. These communities also include supportive land uses such as community centers, retail centers, commercial offices, schools and other public facilities.

To the south is the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve which runs in a west-to-east direction between Del Mar Mesa and Mira Mesa. To the north of Del Mar Mesa, the land areas identified by the Framework Plan as Subareas III and IV, known as Pacific Highlands Ranch and Torrey Highlands, respectively, have both been shifted to planned urbanizing by a majority vote of the people.

The Torrey Highlands Subarea Plan includes 2,693 residential dwelling units, 35 acres of commercial space, a 45-acre mixed-use center, improved and unimproved trails, two neighborhood parks and elementary, middle and high schools. The Pacific Highlands Ranch Subarea Plan includes 5,182 residential dwelling units, a 34-acre mixed-use core, improved and unimproved trails, a library, elementary, junior and high schools and a transit center.

The western portion of SR-56 is partially built to the northwest. This major roadway is planned for extension in an east-west direction across the communities of Pacific Highlands Ranch and Torrey Highlands. Ultimately, it will connect I-5 to I-15, from Carmel Valley to Rancho Peñasquitos and provide an east-west linkage between these two north-south interstates.

#### **4. Land Ownership**

Del Mar Mesa is broken into approximately 130 Assessor's Parcels comprising 2,042 acres held by over 60 separate owners (see **Figure 30**). Of these ownerships, the smallest area held is one acre and the largest is 358 acres. Median ownership is 15 acres. At the time the specific plan was adopted in 1997, a total of 551 acres were held by public agencies (the City of San Diego owned 432 acres, the County of San Diego 29 acres and the state of California 89 acres), which represented more than 25 percent of the community (see **Table 5**). Since the date of adoption, additional land has been purchased for the purposes of conservation and mitigation. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now owns 52 acres and the rights to approximately 20 acres were acquired by private entities for the purpose of mitigation. Included within City ownership is the 251 acres, known as the park-trade parcel, which was conveyed to the City of San Diego in the mid-1990s. Additionally, SDG&E holds an easement on ten acres of land located in the area zoned AR-1-2. San Diego Gas and Electric purchased the easement as off-site mitigation.

#### **5. Zoning**

Approximately 240 acres in the central part of Del Mar Mesa are zoned AR-1-2 which permits a maximum density of one dwelling unit/acre (see **Figure 24**). Approximately 1041 acres are zoned AR-1-1 and may be developed at a density

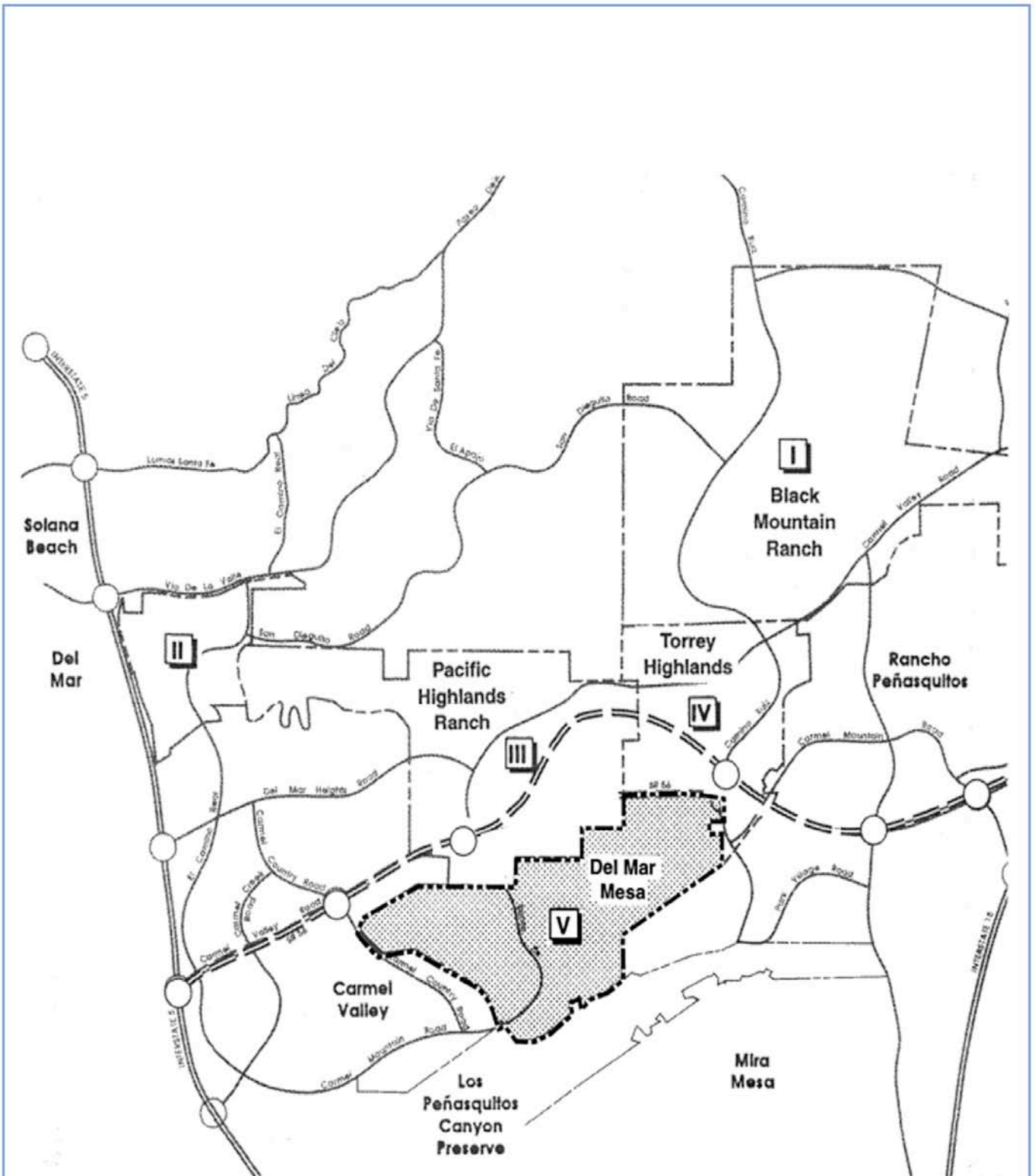
of one dwelling unit per 2.5 acres. The remainder of the community is zoned AR-1-1, located within the area designated for Resource Based Open Space, and may be developed at a density of one dwelling unit per ten acres on the least sensitive portion of the site.(see **Figure 24**)

Part of Del Mar Mesa is also within the Hillside Review Overlay Zone (HR) and areas in the north and south of the community are located within the Coastal Zone (**Figure 24**). Upon the adoption of the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan by the California Coastal Commission on August 13, 1997, the city assumed coastal permit authority for all areas located in the Coastal Zone within the Del Mar Mesa community.

#### **6. Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar Noise**

The eastern open space/rural residential portion of the Del Mar Mesa community is located under the Julian departure corridor for the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Miramar. While development in the community is considered compatible with flight operations, some residents may experience concern over aircraft noise and over-flight. Occupants will be frequently over-flown by military aircraft and will experience varying degrees of noise and vibration. These concerns can be partially mitigated through noise attenuation to applicable standards, adherence to the approved and established flight corridors by MCAS Miramar and by full disclosure of flight operation impacts.

On occasion, MCAS Miramar may operate 24 hours per day, seven days a week. In deference to local communities, however, operations are normally scheduled from 7:00 a.m. to midnight during the week and from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekends. The military reserves the right to fly prior to or past normal operating hours to fulfill mission requirements.

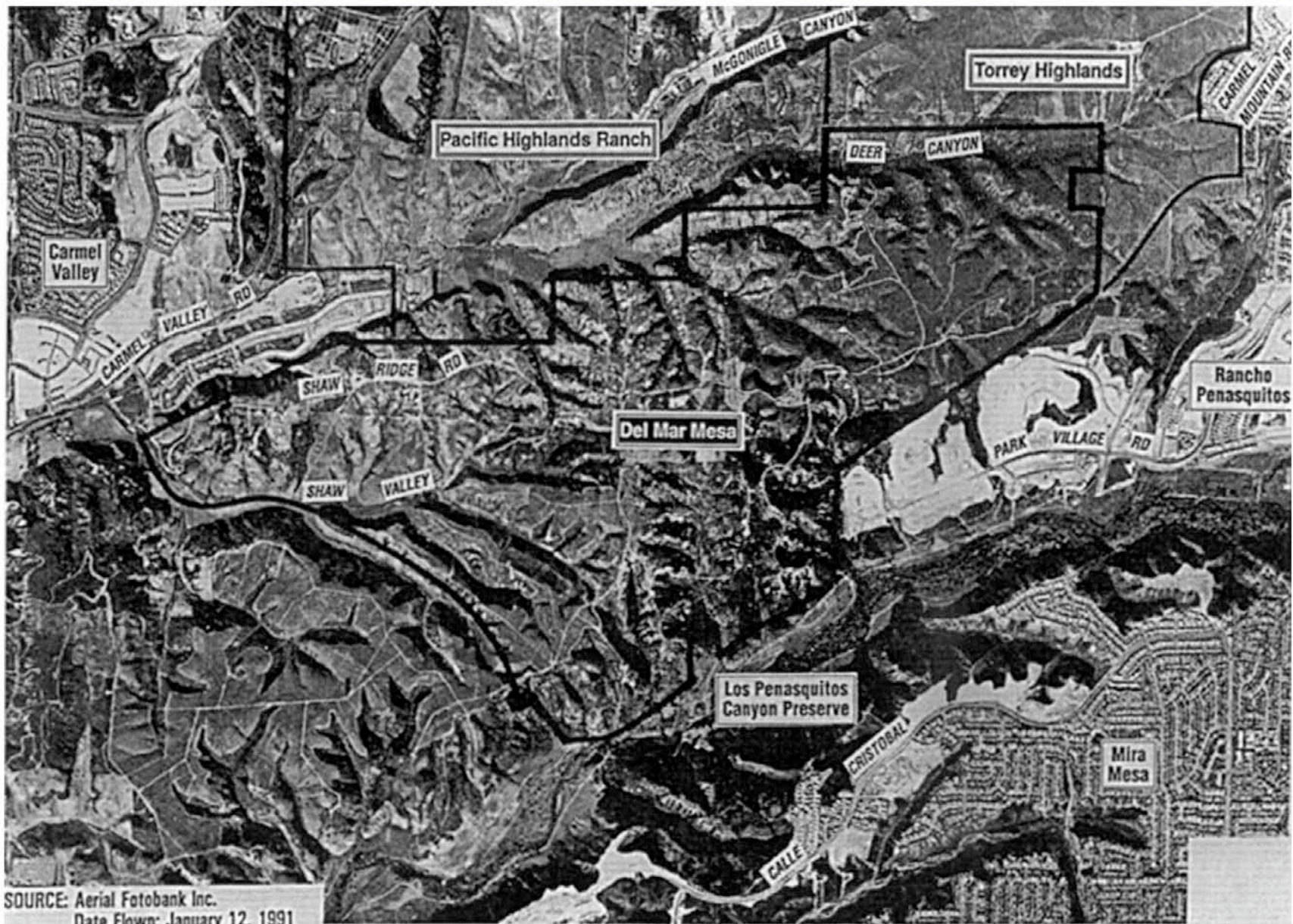


**Surrounding Communities**  
Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan

**2**

FIGURE





**Aerial Photograph**  
Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan

**3**  
FIGURE

## **B. PLANNING HISTORY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

### **1. City's Growth Management Program**

In 1979, the Progress Guide and General Plan (General Plan) established a tiered growth management system to encourage the revitalization of the urban core while growth and development in outlying areas would be phased and sequenced in accordance with the availability of public facilities and services. This system classified the entire City as Urbanized, Planned Urbanizing, or Future Urbanizing.

The Future Urbanizing Area consisted primarily of land that was vacant and zoned A-1 (primarily for agricultural uses), and was intended to be released for urban development only when the Urbanized and Planned Urbanizing areas were sufficiently built out pursuant to the relevant guidelines and policies in the General Plan. As part of the overall growth management program, the third tier—the Future Urbanizing Area or FUA—was established as an urban reserve, an area intended for future planning and development. The City's objectives in the urban reserve, therefore, were to avoid premature urbanization, to conserve open space and natural environmental features and to protect the fiscal resources of the City by precluding costly sprawl. The General Plan also recommends the permanent retention of rural, resource based and open space uses where appropriate.

In 1985, the citizens of San Diego voted to approve the "Managed Growth Initiative" (Proposition A), which applies to all lands designated as FUA on August 1, 1984. Proposition A requires voter approval to "phase shift" land from the Future Urbanizing Area designation and voter approval to ease development restrictions in the FUA. Proposition A does allow the City Council to amend regulations affecting land within the FUA, provided that the amendments are neutral or more restrictive in terms of permitting development.

The North City Future Urbanizing Area (NCFUA) is divided into five subareas. Del Mar Mesa is identified as Subarea V. Most of Subareas I, III and IV, Black Mountain Ranch, Pacific Highlands Ranch and Torrey Highlands respectively, have all been shifted to planned urbanizing by a majority vote of the people. In addition to Del Mar Mesa, Subarea II and small portions of Subareas I, III and IV have not been shifted to planned urbanizing and remain in the North City Future Urbanizing Area.

### **2. Framework Plan**

On October 1, 1992, the City Council adopted the Framework Plan for the North City Future Urbanizing Area as an amendment to the General Plan. The Framework Plan designates a range of residential densities, mixed uses, public facility requirements and substantial open space areas. Because of the residential densities and types of land uses designated, approval of a phase shift by the voters was necessary to implement much of the Framework Plan.

The Framework Plan envisioned low-density residential development for Del Mar Mesa, with densities ranging from .8 dwelling units/gross acre in the northwest quadrant of the subarea to .2 dwelling unit/gross acre in the southwest quadrant (see **Figure 4**). A small local mixed-use center was also shown which included multifamily development. The eastern half of the Del Mar Mesa was designated as open space. A total of 840 dwelling units (550 single-family and 290 multifamily) were shown for Subarea V in the Framework Plan. An alternative recommendation of the FUA Citizen's Advisory Committee was also approved by the City Council which allocated 1,200 dwelling units to the subarea. The intent of the Council was to reconcile these two numbers in the subsequent subarea planning process.

The Framework Plan required the preparation of detailed subarea plans for each of the five subareas before development can occur. A specific plan, consistent with existing General Plan and Framework Plan policies, was prepared as an alternative to preparing a subarea plan and to obtaining a phase shift from future to planned urbanizing. A majority vote of the people is required in order to phase shift land from future to planned urbanizing and to allow an increase in the intensity of uses permitted in the community. The specific plan addresses the necessary requirements to achieve densities greater than one dwelling unit/ten acres as specified in Section 2.5f of the Framework Plan, while not increasing the intensity of uses permitted in the community.

The General Plan, Guidelines for Future Development, recommends the categorization and designation of environmentally sensitive lands in the Future Urbanizing Area. In response to this, the Environmental Tier mapping effort was initiated for the North City Future Urbanizing Area. This involved gathering data on numerous environmental and land use factors, transferring the data onto maps and entering the data into a computerized Geographic Information System. A rating was assigned to each category of data and multiple overlays of assorted data led to analysis of environmental factors. Although it was not accomplished at a detailed scale, the analysis of these overlays led to the adoption of the Environmental Tier, as the Open Space Element for the Framework Plan. The Environmental Tier, as designated by the Framework Plan, identified lands containing significant sensitive resources, including biologically and culturally sensitive areas, floodplains, unique landscape features and significant topography; and identified corridors for wildlife movement, as well as other open space connections to link major parks, reserves and significant resource areas.

The Framework Plan recommends that the Environmental Tier be protected through purchase, conveyance to a public agency or nonprofit land trust, or via other restrictions that limit development and use.

The Framework Plan is the overall policy document for Del Mar Mesa while the specific plan is intended to provide further detail regarding implementation of this plan. The Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan establishes development standards for the community. In cases where the specific plan is silent, the San Diego



Municipal Code and the Framework Plan shall provide development regulations, standards and policies for the community. Wherever the policies or development standards of the specific plan differ from the Framework Plan, the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan shall take precedence.

### **3. Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan**

In March 1994, the City Council approved the placement of a phase shift vote for areas in the Future Urbanizing Area, including Del Mar Mesa, on the June 1994 general election ballot. This phase shift measure was rejected by the voters. In response, City staff, Del Mar Mesa property owners and citizen groups met in the fall of 1994 to explore alternatives that would allow economically feasible development and maximize the retention of an interconnected open space system without the need for a phase shift prior to implementation.

As a result of the failure of the ballot measure, and property owner input, City staff recognized that comprehensive planning in the NCFUA faced a highly uncertain future, and proposed, therefore, the specific planning process as an alternative to subarea plan preparation required by the Framework Plan. Ultimately, the City Council directed City staff to assume the lead in the preparation of a specific plan. The Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan was originally adopted in 1997 and amended in 2000.

Since the failure of the 1994 ballot measure, three subareas have been shifted to planned urbanizing by a majority vote of the people. These subareas, Subareas 1, 3 and 4, will now urbanize in a manner consistent with the Framework Plan and the adopted subarea plans.

### **4. Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP)**

Since the adoption of the Framework Plan (and the Environmental Tier) in 1992, the City's resource planning efforts largely involved the development of the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP), a joint regional habitat conservation plan between the City, the County of San Diego and ten other municipalities in southwestern San Diego County. Implementation of the MSCP will maintain bio-diversity throughout the San Diego area, minimize or avoid species extinction and create a new, streamlined process at the local level as a replacement for certain federal and state permits. The City has completed the planning effort to identify core biological resource areas and corridors targeted for conservation and, has entered into an implementing agreement with the federal and state wildlife agencies to ensure implementation of the resource conservation plan and habitat Preserve. The **MSCP/Open Space Element** of the Del Mar Mesa Specific Plan was developed in conjunction with the planning effort for the MSCP Subarea Plan, which was adopted in 1997.

